



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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9 February 2006

### **ZWE100924.E**

Zimbabwe: Whether critics of the government or human rights agencies are subject to direct or covert harassment by the authorities with specific reference to persons advocating for women's rights in divorce proceedings (2004-2006)  
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

In 16 January 2006 correspondence, a representative of the Women's Action Group (WAG) stated that while the government "may refuse to enact appropriate legislation or sign international human rights instruments" related to gender rights, "[a]uthorities do not harass human rights groups for advocating for women's rights in divorce proceedings."

A representative of the Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association (ZWLA) partially corroborated the preceding information in 27 January 2006 correspondence, noting that their organization was not aware of groups "advocating for women's rights in divorce being subjected to harassment by the authorities unless such criticism is coupled with other political activism."

In April 2005, Amnesty International (AI) reported police disruption of a prayer gathering at Harare's Africa Unity Square, organized by the "grassroots group" Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) (AI 1 Apr. 2005). According to AI, the police arrested more than 250 women, subjecting some to physical abuse resulting in injury (ibid.). Since 2003, AI also noted, without providing details, that authorities have repeatedly targeted WOZA activities (ibid.).

In November 2005, the World Organization Against Torture (Organisation Mondiale Contre la Torture, OMCT) noted that the coordinator of the Woman's Coalition, Netsai Mushonga, was arrested for "convening a meeting at a local hotel for training women in using non violent means as a tool for dispute resolution under the banner of Women Peacemakers International" (14 Nov. 2005). Moreover, Mushonga was reportedly detained for one night and charged with breaching an article of the Public Order and Security Act (POSA), which stipulates that political meetings need prior clearance by the authorities (World OMCT 14 Nov. 2005). Mushonga was subsequently released and told that once police completed their investigation, she would be summoned to court (ibid.). No further information about this case could be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

International human rights reports of 2004, 2005, and 2006 also noted that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) generally faced increasing government-sponsored "intimidation and legal harassment" (Freedom House 11 Aug. 2005;

HRW 13 Jan. 2005; *ibid.* 18 Jan. 2006; AI 2005; *Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 4). According to Human Rights Watch, the draft NGO bill that was tabled in October 2004 would "require NGOs to register with a government-appointed Council of NGOs that would have virtually unchecked power to investigate and audit the groups' activities and funding" (13 Jan. 2005). The NGO bill subsequently passed parliamentary approval on 9 December 2004 and, among other things, would reportedly ban groups' receiving of foreign funding for their work on governance and human rights issues (AI 2005; *Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 4). However, by November 2005, President Mugabe had not signed the bill into law and it was reportedly being referred back to Parliament for "further discussion" (UN 28 Nov. 2005). In January 2006, HRW stated that while the NGO bill had not been signed into law, "its existence has had a detrimental effect on the ability of human rights groups to operate freely, as they fear that the Act may be revived and lead to their shutting down" (18 Jan. 2006). No further information on the status of the NGO bill could be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

#### References

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Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association (ZWLA). 27 January 2006. Correspondence received from a representative.

#### Additional Sources Consulted

Efforts to obtain information from the Legal Resources Foundation and the Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre and Network (ZWRCN) were unsuccessful.

The Musasa Project was unable to provide information within time constraints.

**Internet sites, including:** BBC News, European Country of Origin Information Network (ECOI), Factiva, Kubatana, International Commission of Jurists, PeaceWomen, Southern Africa Regional Poverty Network, United Kingdom Immigration and Nationality Directorate, United Nations CEDAW, World News Connection.

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